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PART VIII

Conclusion

In solidarity

Arun Verma

Introduction

When thinking about solidarity and collective action, I prime this chapter with a quote from Lilla Watson who said “if you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (1985).¹ This collective action is often referred to as ‘allyship’, whereby the notion of allyship can be defined from

late 14c., as ‘relative, kinsman’ from ally (v.); mid-15c. in the sense of ‘one united with another by treaty or league’. Allies as the name of the nations aligned against the Central Powers in World War I is from 1914; as the nations aligned against Germany, Italy and Japan in World War II, from 1939. ([Etymonline, 2020](#))

In the context of anti-racism,

Allyship is a proactive, ongoing, and incredibly difficult practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalised group of people

to help take down the systems that challenge that group's basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society. ([Rochester Racial Justice Toolkit](#), 2020)

Examples of allyship have existed in wider equalities movements. For example, as part of the LGBTQI+ movements, there were notable increases in the number of 'out-group alliances' of non-LGBTQI+ individuals who would support this movement. This was noted through the mainstreaming of LGBTQI+ in the media ([Ng, 2013](#)) and education ([Nash & Browne, 2019](#)). There are also examples of allyship in solidarity with people living with a disability and/or d/Deafness. For example, disabled artists have contested the stereotyped representations of disability in media narratives, and critiqued these stereotypes (for example, [Hadley, 2020](#)). Discourses of allyship in this area have focused on voice, agency and those with lived experience of disability and d/Deafness (for example, [Forber-Pratt, Mueller & Andrews, 2019](#)). Calls have been made to redefine allyship for people to reconsider their roles in shaping disability identities with references to enacting social models of disability to be authentic allies (for example, [Forber-Pratt, Mueller & Andrews, 2019](#)).

When exploring types of allies, [Carlson et al \(2019\)](#) refer to some of the traits of effective allies being non-self-absorbed, welcoming criticism, being accountable, listening, shutting up and reading. These traits and practices can enable allies to transition from being apathetic and unaware to more active and anti-inequality-led ([Reid, 2020](#)). In this move to a more active role in becoming anti-racist, the following change domains explore some of the areas to support our journey as a community to becoming anti-racist.

Change domains

The areas of change were identified during an online event that was hosted on allyship for race equality in universities and are a result of a community of anti-racism allies engaging in active advocacy for race equality in HE ([Verma, 2020](#)).

Leaders in solidarity

Senior leadership need to be actively advocating for the rights of racial minorities in their organisations through role modelling ‘allyship’ behaviours and empowering communities racialised as Black, Asian and ethnic minorities in their institutions. This should be done in reference to practising allyship behaviours noted in [Carlson et al \(2019\)](#) to build upon the behaviours as noted in the article and reconsidered with anti-racism in mind:

- Constant action: referring to the ability to always engage, demonstrate and commit to accountability through everyday anti-racism action.
- Embrace the intersections of oppression and privilege: recognise the intersectionality between oppression and privilege in racialised individual, interpersonal and structural relationships.
- Accountability and critical reflection: reflecting on your position as an ‘ally’ in your position to others, to communities and within different structures. Utilising critical reflection to inform critical action is critical to becoming anti-racist.
- Empower participation and voice: enable and empower the participation of those living at the intersection of multiple disadvantages, marginalisation and deprivation in society.
- Appreciate criticism and feedback: always strive for an open learning mindset to build knowledge and confidence in your journey to anti-racism and tackling wider inequalities.
- Be proactive: [Carlson et al \(2019\)](#) refer to this as ‘describing privileged individuals allyship posture of learning to listen and listening to learn ([Giannaki, 2016](#), para.12, citing Adelina Nicholls), and being self-motivated’.
- Ally is not a badge of honour: recognise that allyship and solidarity are led by actions and not by social labels.

Learning, unlearning and relearning

Unlearning, learning and evaluating one’s own intersecting privileges and oppressions within the HE system can enable more authentic empathy and allyship for race equality in all aspects of universities. Such unlearning and self-reflection require allies to

immerse themselves in the literature, evidence and voices of those that have raised issues concerning living within racist and colonial structures. This may be in the form of singular workshops; however, it is shown that coaching models with decision-making groups can play a significant role in creating sustainable changes for racial EDI (for example, [Cooper et al, 2020](#)).

Collective action

Racist cultures can only change when all the people within the system challenge the structure in which racism lives. To enable allies and racialised people of colour in universities to build and sustain anti-racism in university cultures, there is a need for allies to call out and address racial aggressions towards people of colour. Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students will continue to be minoritised, which can mean that Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students are not often represented in decision-making forums that can directly impact their experience, retention and success (for example, [Bhopal, 2014](#)). This means that allies need to be actively practising and doing anti-racism in spaces where they may typically be no Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation.

Formalising sponsorship and lead roles

Formalising senior leader sponsorship for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and student networks in institutions to demonstrate and role model race equality allyship is crucial for sustaining culture, behaviour and systemic changes in race equality in HE institutions. Sponsors should not wait to hear from their Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff or student network, but should actively seek out ways they can support the network's vision. This role modelling enables institutions to all learn from each other and take bold steps to embark on an authentic anti-racism journey. However, such sponsorship can be considered tokenistic and paying 'lip service' to race equality. To overcome these concerns, embedding mechanisms and review points with sponsors to monitor progress and success are crucial and should be agreed. Sponsors should be willing to step down

if they are not able to perform and advocate for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and student issues at different hierarchical levels of the institution.

Reflective questions

- Have you read up on issues concerning structural, institutional and individual racism?
- When you read about White privilege and fragility, do you understand that it is to do with cultivating a more diverse and inclusive environment?
- Did you know that centring the voices of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities when designing and delivering services will mean that you have systems and structures in place that enable everyone to thrive?
- How are you supporting and enabling your Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and/or students' development, retention and success in HE?
- How many times have you said in a meeting that you were not comfortable with a racist comment that was made? If you don't feel like you can speak up, what will it take?

Note

- ¹ As referenced from a talk given at the UN Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi in 1985.

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